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DECORATION & FURNITURE

THE STYLE OF "THE EMPIRE."



DECORATIVE PANEL. DESIGNED BY PERCIER AND FONTAINE.

PERHAPS the most characteristic period in the history of furniture in France is that of the first Napoleon. The style of the Empire is entirely different from that of any reign that preceded it. Up to that time we find that forms of furniture, following the logic of events, were derived from the previous architectural models. Not so in the style of the Empire. This is distinct, it being based almost ag-

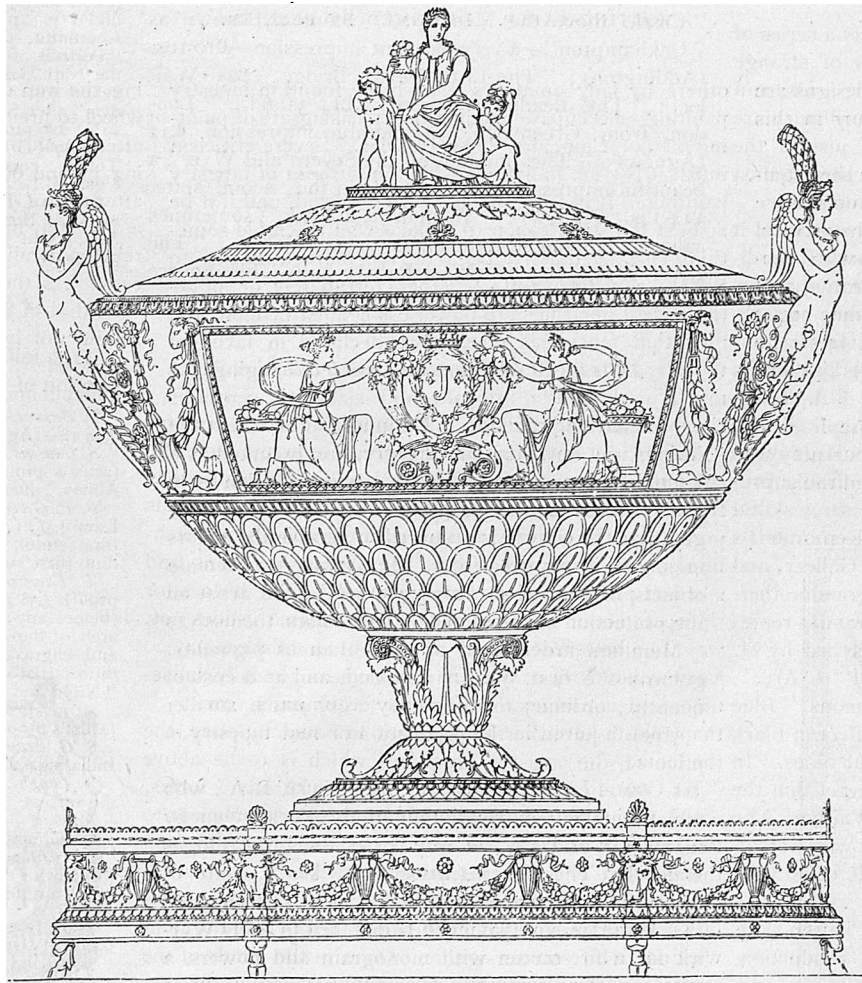
gressively on the models of the ancients. It owes its origin to one man—Charles Percier. We might say, perhaps, to two men, for Pierre Fontaine worked so assiduously in collaboration with his friend Percier that their names can hardly be mentioned apart. It is surprising what a complete mastery these young men in a few years contrived to exercise over the tastes of their day.

Charles Percier was, in the strictest sense of the term, a self-made man. He was born in Paris in 1764, of poor parents, who, with the cares of maintaining a large family, were able to give him little education. Springing from the people, it was by sheer force of perseverance, patience, and untiring industry that he emancipated himself from the humble sphere of his surroundings. His father, by birth a Swiss, was porter at one of the gates of the Tuileries, and was gradually promoted to a post in the interior of the palace grounds. Young Percier, who at a very early age showed aptitude in drawing, frequently visited him here, and, going home filled with vivid recollections of what he had seen, industriously recorded his impressions with pencil and paper. He could hardly then have dreamt with what importance his name would hereafter be identified with the embellishment of the famous palace. After passing a short time in the studio of a painter named Lagrenée, his progress so gratified his father that a place was found for him in the studio of the architect Peyre the younger. It was there he formed the acquaintance of Pierre Fontaine, which ripened into a life-long friendship. The lads studied together at the Academy of Architecture, under David Leroy, author of "Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce," and it was at this time that Percier formed his great attachment for classical models. He won the second prize in 1783, and in 1784, at the age of twenty years, the "grand prix." The latter triumph enabled him to go to Italy and study at the fountain head of ancient art. His friend Fontaine soon joined him in Rome, and the two fairly revelled in the delights afforded them by the glorious treasures of the Holy City. A few years later Napoleon's spoils from the museums of Italy were brought to Paris, and these doubtless prepared the public taste for the revolution in architectural style in which Percier was destined to play so prominent a part.

The exhibition in Paris of the marvellous sculptures from Rome created extraordinary enthusiasm, which is not difficult to understand when we remember that up

to this time (1789) there was not a single collection of paintings and sculpture open to the public. Hitherto artists who had not been to Italy knew nothing of Greek art but what they could learn from such travesties of the originals as were to be seen in the park of Versailles, or, what were worse, the engravings published in such books as that of David Leroy, already mentioned, or "The Antiquities of Athens," a then famous English work by which the sculptures of the Parthenon were first made known in Paris.

The only notable authenticated Greek statues owned by France at this time were the "Jason," the "Venus d'Arles," the "Germanicus," and the "Diane de Versailles," and these were jealously guarded in the Versailles gallery, permission to reproduce them, or even to make studies of them, being rigidly withheld. The paintings of the Palais Royal, and the very poor collection of plaster casts belonging to the academy and serving for the instruction of the pupils there, were the sole objects for study accessible to the young artists of the day. Following this depressing void came the tri-



SOUP TUREEN. DESIGNED BY PERCIER FOR THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE.

umphs of Napoleon in Italy, and works of art of every kind were then poured into France. The National Museum was suddenly enriched with antique sculptures unsurpassed in beauty and rarity, despoiled from the noblest collections in Italy. Interest in art became a rage. Acquaintance with these classical treasures gave it direction, and Percier, whose whole soul was in the work, proved to be the man of the hour, and, under the patronage of the Emperor, gave to France its "Empire" style—not only in decoration and furniture, but in silverware, jewelry, and industrial art of every kind. The objects we have chosen for illustration in the present article are of this, the most successful period of his career, when, easy in fortune, and with the favor of the court, he was able to work untrammelled, and present in their best possible form the best products of his hand and brain. The outlines of the style of "the Empire" are generally graceful and the detail is often admirable, but, redundant in trifling ornament, the style itself is meretricious.

CARPET DESIGNING IN AMERICA.

THE progress made in the manufacture of American carpets has been specially marked in the history of our native industries. The mechanical perfection of the fabric lies naturally in the way of our national development. It is certain that the American body Brussels and Wiltons fully equal the English goods. A dealer who used to import body Brussels from his own English looms has given up the importation, and now buys his goods in this country from other manufacturers, finding no sale for the English carpets, notwithstanding their prestige, over the equally good and cheaper American carpets.

But it is the improvement in designs and coloring seen in our home goods which makes them specially worth consideration. Concerning this there are some mistaken opinions. It is customary to refer everything in the way of artistic value in our manufactures to the impetus given by the Centennial Exposition. The truth is, that attention was then only called to it, and that not so much by comparison with foreign goods as by the favor our own work met among foreigners. Unquestionably the English art revival, the efforts of Eastlake, Morris, and Dresser, have had their influence in this country. But there is a practical element in the American which recognizes the limit where absurdity and incoherence begin. Morris's æsthetic sage-greens and strained forms, which mark much of his later work find no congenial tastes as yet on this side of the water, where a certain robustness in art still holds its own.

The great influences which now tell upon our American designs are those of Persia and Japan. To the first may be attributed the modern use of color and geometrical forms; to the latter the more restrained use of floral designs. Persian rugs furnish the sources of the one inspiration, and Japanese painting that of the other, and both of these so successfully that we may well afford to dispense as yet with greater originality. Those who have examined the carpets furnished to the Union League Club house from the looms of the Bigelow Carpet Company will understand how freely and agreeably these motives adapt themselves to our needs. An example of this is in the carpet of the small dining-rooms, whose deep blues, olives, and amber combine with the rich cherry and dark green of the walls, leading up to the deep rich tones of the ceiling panelled in stamped leather paper and treated by hand.

Unfortunately the best of these designs are not easily seen in numbers except at the salesrooms. There one finds such carpets as are provided by Herter and Marcotte for the houses which they furnish. Almost all of these give some suggestive key to which the mind would insensibly refer in providing for the further furnishing of an apartment. One of them, for example, has a rich orange ground scattered over with small palms described in blocks of different colors, leaving the ground free within. It is as rich and vigorous in color as a tiger's skin, and forbids all association with the refined elegance of French brocades and Renaissance scrolls. A Japanese design has an amber ground broken up with fret-work, and at intervals groups of highly conventionalized flowers. These flowers are small, and filled in with bits of pure color. With this also one refuses to associate the naturalistic garlands of French draperies and wall-hangings, and at the same time declines the Persian colors and pale antique tints. This clear expression of an idea associated with a certain

scheme of color denotes a self-possession in the mind of the designer which the practical American prefers, and which he holds in common with the French, to whom he is allied in matters of taste, rather than with the prevailing form of English æstheticism.

The determination on the part of the manufacturers to secure the best designs is seen in the amount of money expended in these alone. An establishment of such extent as that of the Bigelow Carpet Company expends twenty-five thousand dollars yearly in wages alone to designers. Such firms employ only their own men. These are almost exclusively foreigners—French, English, and Scotch. But there are constantly rising from the ranks boys who enter the rooms first to grind colors and are gradually promoted, according to the aptitude they show. It remains to be seen what the system of industrial drawing, such as is taught in the common schools, will do in this direction. It is well known that the artistic value of the work of the French artisan is due to the thorough knowledge of drawing which is in France made a part of every curriculum. The French workman in his Sunday stroll in the country sees a spray whose form or coloring attracts him; he gathers it, takes it home, copies it, and subsequently adapts it to wall-paper, cretonne, chintz, or carpets, as may be his trade.

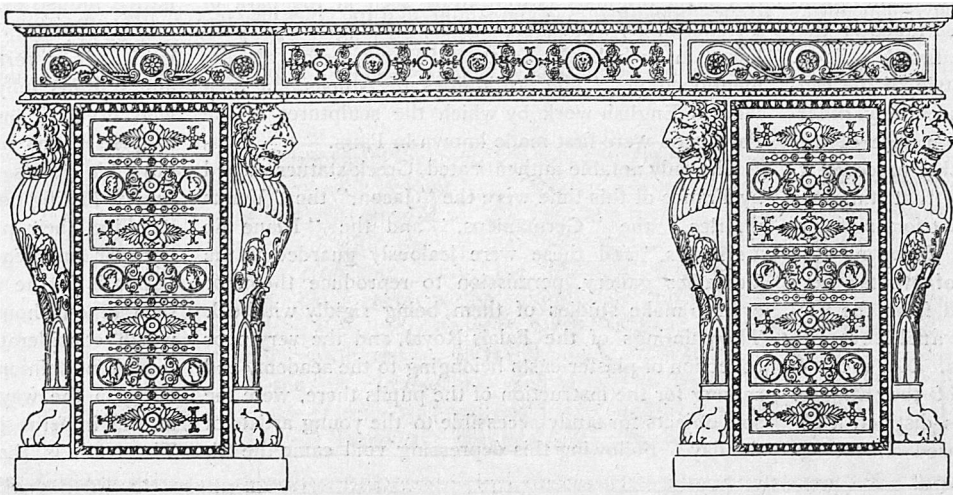
At present almost all our motives for floral designs are drawn from France, whose skill and delicacy in this direction are seen nowhere else.

Carpet designing is beginning to occupy the attention of women among other branches of decorative work. There seems to be no reason why they should not succeed in this, if taken up seriously and with practical intent; and it certainly offers a remunerative field when they become able to occupy it. This they ought to be able to do; the subject of carpets interests no class more nearly, and upon them usually falls the burden of choice. The difficulty lies, of course, in the few opportunities for technical instruction. The Ladies' Art Association has undertaken a class in carpet designing taught by Mrs. Cory, who has pursued the sub-

art value, in which case there is no doubt of substantial success. In carpet-designing, as in other things, there yet remains room at the top for talent and industry, irrespective of sex.

TAPESTRY PAINTING.

AN exhibition of tapestry paintings, the first of its kind, has lately been held by Messrs. Howell & James, at their new art galleries in Regent Street, London. Some of the works were by professional artists, and



WRITING-TABLE. DESIGNED BY PERCIER.

others by lady amateurs who have found in tapestry painting an occupation akin to the pleasing art of painting on porcelain, already so popular. Severe criticism must, it is true, find fault with the purpose of tapestry painting. It is an imitation twice removed, and if it be against the strict canon to make a wall resemble something else, so must it be a degree more atrocious to imitate a sham. But—whether fortunately or not—these rigid doctrines are powerless against fashion, and now that fancy has once more declared in favor of tapestry, it is inevitable that the painted hangings so much used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries should again be produced. The material on which the paintings, in imitation of tapestry, are executed is a stout ribbed canvas, producing a perfect illusion as to texture when it is painted over. It must not be supposed that the canvas is prepared to receive the colors by sizing or in any other way. It is required to remain soft and pliable, and is simply wetted by the artist on the spots about to be colored. The colors themselves would be better described as dyes than as pigments. Very satisfactory results are obtained, and at a cost of time, and consequently of money, very much smaller than that involved in the production of real tapestry in the loom.

Sir Coutts Lindsay and Mr. G. F. Watts, R.A., who acted as judges, awarded numerous prizes, given by the Duchess of Teck, the lady patronesses, the judges themselves, The Queen (newspaper), The Gazette of Fashion, and Messrs. Howell & James. The Duchess of Teck's prize, an enamelled badge, fell to Lady Warwick for a fire-screen with monogram and flowers, a perfect imitation of the fine tapestry of Beauvais. Miss Shoesmith, another amateur, won the lady patronesses' prize with a very original portière with flowers and palms and two handsome screens; Miss L. E. Cameron-Galton took The Queen prize, for amateurs, and Miss C. F. Armstrong the prize given by the same newspaper for professionals.

Prizes were also awarded to Miss Emily A. Berridge, Miss A. Goodday, Miss S. Lawson, Miss Austin Carter, Miss Mayo (of the English School of Art at Rome), and to Messrs. W. Fourniss, Fred Miller, H. Ryland, J. S. Donlevy, and M. B. Grenié—the latter of whom received the silver medal for the best work exhibited by a foreign professional. M. Grenié's work was remarkable for richness of color and exact imitation of the Gobelins style. In the opinion of many good judges, however, this is not the best school of tapestry. Happier models may be selected from the ancient Flemish tapestry, the "arras," properly so called, in which there is less attempt at "modelling," and the effect is flatter, and more suited to mural decoration. It would seem that the best kind of tapestry for imitation is thoroughly appreciated by Captain

Danyell, whose copy from the Bargello at Florence was "highly commended." It may, however, be pointed out that in copying ancient tapestry it is hardly necessary to imitate exactly the faded colors of the original. To do this is to work rather in the Chinese than the European spirit.

NEW DECORATIVE METAL CASTINGS.

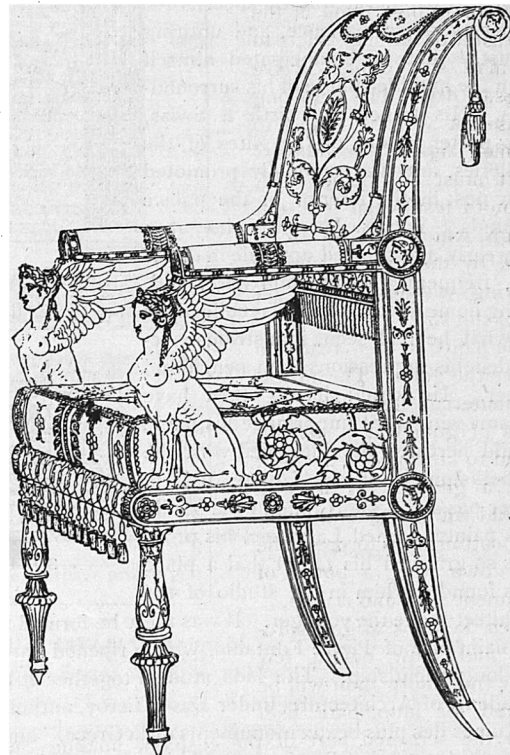
MR. JOHN G. LOW, of Boston, whose relief art tiles have given him an enviable reputation, has lately produced some art castings in iron with bronze effects which have astonished every one who has seen them. His experiments in this direction have been made by the Magee Art Castings Company, at the foundry of the Magee Furnace Company at Chelsea, Mass., who have reproduced some masterpieces of metal work with so much skill that even connoisseurs to whom they have been submitted have, at first sight, taken them for bronzes or beaten copper. Some good specimens of this work are to be seen at the rooms of Mr. Caryl Coleman, at the corner of Broadway and Twelfth Street. These include a large Cellini shield, profusely decorated, which is plated with brass and colored most artistically; another ornamented shield retain-

ing the iron color of the casting, but buffed on a rag-wheel to prevent oxidation, and a pair of small panels, after classic bronzes, with leopards in relief, and a charming plaque of larger size reproducing a repoussé work after one of Teniers' pictures. Even such fine work as a delicately modelled medal, after an antique, and a low relief portrait by St. Gaudens, is undertaken with success. As the cost of these plates is not much more than that of ordinary castings, we do not see why they should not be freely used wherever the latter may be employed. Orders have already been taken from architects and cabinet-makers for decorative plaques of



DECORATIVE PANEL. DESIGNED BY PERCIER.

ject with much enthusiasm, and in the face of many disadvantages, and whose designs are now a constant source of profit. The members of the class are all ladies, who enter it with a thorough knowledge of drawing, and their studies are only directed to obtaining the technical instruction which will enable them to adapt their designs to the limitations prescribed by the machinery. This there is no doubt but that they will be able to accomplish. It will probably be, in any case, a long time before women will be regularly admitted to designing-rooms as men now are, or even as apprentices, as boys are admitted. But having once learned how to submit to manufacturers intelligible, practicable designs, it will remain with the individual to give them



ARM-CHAIR. DESIGNED BY PERCIER AND FONTAINE.

this sort. It is to be hoped that those natural enemies of good decoration—the stove-makers—may be converted so far as to recognize at least the profit that might accrue to them by introducing such artistic castings into their manufactures.

COARSE Italian, Greek, or Flemish lace is much used for ornamenting furniture, if people are fortunate enough to possess it. An Indian or Roman scarf is also often used for the same purpose. Sometimes the back of the piano underneath is of worked, painted, or plain